

georgiana barcan

thesis outline

lens-based

2021



digital illustration, 2020

Introduction & Background

The writing practices throughout the master's program and my previous independent endeavours have historically called me into a foresty morass of storytelling and fiction, this is the mossy lens through which I would like to traverse as I script my creative thesis. The resulting collection of stories will be part of the graduation project/installation where the audience will be able to take the printed version with them as they are visiting the space. The publication is like an extended version of the exhibition storyline which can be further contemplated as one leaves with the memory of the film and sculptures.

Memory and lived experience form the foundations of all my practice, while I weave my ideas into new forms using either crude or tired tools. My writing project is rooted in my recollections of my grandmother's garden and the events surrounding it. Memory is a fallible thing, as imagination often stirs the sediment of events, mixing them into a new, cloudy liquid (whether these events come to me as they truly happened or not, I will never know). The stories and memories are told through autofiction and speculation, scrutinizing the ecosystem of the garden under a magnifying glass which reveals a world of kindness and anger, kinship and fear, love and regret. What interests me here are not only the tangled family relationships but also the neglected intricate existences of those creatures around us that are smaller and non-verbal (or just using a different language), such as herbs, insects, birds, grass, bacteria etcetera.



[family]
35mm picture taken in Romania, 2015

I was raised in Romania by my grandmother as my parents had demanding jobs, so they could not look after me. The garden in my grandmother's courtyard is where I learned about storytelling and wandering; it was an infinite well of curiosity and hiding places where I could disappear. The garden and its inhabitants became the totems upon which my imagination was formed. I align with Robin Kimmerer when she encourages us to see plants as persons, as our relatives and family. When I am drinking my grandmother's tea – the one made from herbs she picked from the nearby fields – I am drinking my family's blood. I guess that when one does not identify with the same species as the family they were assigned at birth, one takes to drinking the fluids of their non-human family as a gesture of kinship.

The garden from my childhood was not large or spectacular, not even that special for anyone who visited us, except for me alone. There, my grandmother (her name is Adela) planted some flowers and herbs (roses, bleeding hearts, violets, lilies, parsley, lovage, etc.) that grew back every year and others that changed every season. It was neither a full flower garden, nor a vegetable patch, but a hybrid, which reflected that they were once peasant farmers who moved to a small city. A long, tendrillous vine covers the entirety of our courtyard, and in the summer it creates a green, shady rooftop. Every time one of the plants is in bloom, grandma would take me on a small expedition of the garden when we would carefully inspect the new sprigs, shoots and growths and revisit the ones that were already bloomed. I would often see her bent between the plants, ploughing the soil and tending to some old roots and talking to herself – or to the plants. These are some of my most beautiful memories, as they dragged me out of the dysfunctional family.

I believe that growth, for any living thing, is a tragic, painful process and therefore, for those who never stop growing, life in itself is full of trodden stems and sappy lacerations. I see my childhood as a mix of my grandmother's caring gestures and these aching states of physical and emotional expansion into the world. I intend to transpose the drama and the poetry of these memories into raw storytelling by selecting some of the beings, gestures or objects that marked my childhood and deposit them into fictitious speculations about humans, their troubling emotions, relationships and the natural environment.

Now as an adult I sit and wonder why my memory has vividly selected only some the images: the red mites on the yellow lichens, close up frames of flowers, the caressing hands of my grandmother, the demanding voice of my mother, the heavy hands of my father, my hiding places, the spiders on the walls, the smell of the soil in the morning. The adult I have become is the result of the influence of my family as well as my environment and I would like to focus on how these images, phenomena and stories have shaped me as well as how my non-scientific understanding of the world played a role in my identity.

My stories and research take inspiration from:

- Narration, speculative fiction, symbolism, mythology;
- New narrative movement, identity;
- Ecological theory and philosophy ;

Thesis Statement & Why



[father]
35mm picture taken in Romania, 2015

In my thesis, through speculative autofiction, I aim to tell stories of macro and microscopic critters – as Donna Haraway refers to all living beings-, of the relationship between humans and non-humans; of my childhood traumas as seen through this world. The thesis is comprised of short stories all existing within the same universe, that can be either eerie or horrific, of a sexual disturbing nature, bringing the irrational and the symbolic to the surface, as well as the ambivalence of everything existing (things are neither bad nor good).

Through narration, I intend to surface a sensory, emotional and irrational side of the world, one that cannot always be logically explained, but rather intuited.

Process & Methodology

I chose fiction as I felt that it would be the most honest way in which I could openly talk about my past without fearing the consequences of exposure.

As my writing is interwoven with my graduation project, in both cases, the process started with writing a *legsicon* (I borrow this term from Laure Provoust's publication with the same name, where she describes and illustrates the source of the main subjects and language in her pieces). I use this method to list, describe and research the main "characters" – which are humans, non-humans and objects - in my stories. For each element I research scientific facts, to which I add my personal experience/encounter/memory of it. Some chapters in my *legsicon* are comprised of:

ladder,
candle,



[hiding place]
35mm picture taken in Romania, 2015

bleeding heart,
burdock,
thorns,
mother,
father,
faun,
moss,
fountain,
dog,
peonies,
poppies,
willow tree.



[fountain in the courtyard]
35mm picture taken in Romania, 2015

I use this technique to build an index of the world and to unclog the mental processes involved in remembering and fabulation. In this way I can keep an exercise of writing daily and not breaking the connection with the world I aim to build. Each part of the *legsicon* will be included in the stories or will contribute to the development of the stories, as my own secret entrance door to the world.

The narrative tone and style draw on my obsession with the new narrative writers, such as Dodie Bellamy or Chris Kraus, who write with an “awareness of physical space, metatext, poetic strategies applied to prose, creating works out of found material of autobiography” (Brent Cunningham). I will write with openness, yet under the veil of an animal that I might embody or a pseudonym. I would like the reader to be unable to tell whether the narrator – present in the text- is a human or not. Anthropomorphism plays a central role in the storytelling, as

different species will talk and perform other human-like activities, such as combing their hair.

Despite being fiction, the world of the stories is not a hermetic or pure space, unrelated to the current times, it will instead be adjacent to the now, with the pesticides, with the trash people would throw over our fence, with the loud noises of the Lidl trucks shaking our old, small house from the ground, with the smell of petrol, with the sound of the TV and the disruptive presence of internet and broadband cables on which birds rest.

Other writers that I channel as I am writing are Samantha Schweblin and Kathryn Scanlan whose absurd short stories encourage me and feed my imagination further.

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[self-portrait]
35mm picture taken in Romania, 2015